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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHIANG MAI 000178

SIPDIS

NSC FOR WALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: PM'S PLANNED NOV. 29 VISIT GALVANIZES RED-SHIRTS TO ACT IN  
CHIANG MAI

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 173 (DIALOGUE EXPANDS)  
[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 3 (RED-SHIRTS FLEX)

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Chief, Pol/Econ, CG Chiang Mai.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)  
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Summary and Comment  
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[1](#)1. (C) In the wake of anti-government red-shirt rhetoric tantamount to death threats against Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, red-shirts and supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin are gearing up for a potential showdown with security forces in Chiang Mai during Prime Minister Abhisit's planned November 29 visit to the province to address a national gathering of the Thai Chambers of Commerce. Potential flashpoints include the airport and Le Meridien Hotel (the meeting venue). Unable to rule out protests turning violent, the Consulate has issued a warden message and a security notice.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Had the red-shirts stuck to their plan to convene a national rally in Bangkok beginning on November 28 designed to bring down Abhisit's government, splits between moderates and hardcore Thaksin supporters in Chiang Mai would have become evident to even the most casual observer. The former were planning to join the red-shirt rally in Bangkok, while the latter, led by the militant Rak Chiang Mai 51 (RCM51), were poised to spearhead this weekend's actions in Chiang Mai. The moderates are likely to keep their distance from any violence this weekend, but the numbers of Thaksin supporters expected to travel to Chiang Mai from other provinces in the wake of today's cancellation of the November 28 national rally may only serve to embolden RCM51 and swell its ranks.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment Cont.: Though its membership in the inner city is declining, RCM51 is still capable of mobilizing up-country masses to join rallies on important occasions, largely through financial support from pro-Thaksin politicians. For now, its voice resonates much more with the rural populace than does that of less-well-funded moderate groups like the Confederation for Grassroots Democracy and other red-shirt groups in the nascent Coalition for a Peaceful and Livable Chiang Mai. We will monitor the situation closely, but given RCM51's record of clashes with the security forces and other political groups (Ref B and previous), violent clashes are a real possibility. End

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Come to Abhisit's Cremation  
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14. (SBU) In a November 19 broadcast on his pro-Thaksin radio station, RCM51 leader Phetcharawat Wattanaphongsirikul and a Bangkok-based UDD ( United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship. Or "red-shirts") leader invited listeners to attend a cremation ceremony for PM Abhisit on November 29 in Chiang Mai, where he plans to address a national gathering of the Thai Chambers of Commerce. Describing the action as retribution for the Government's handling of the red-shirt demonstrations in Bangkok and Pattaya in April, during which they asserted (without presenting evidence) that demonstrators were killed and their corpses disposed of, they called on listeners to encircle the airport and eliminate "the root cause" of the country's pain. In order to make this a reality, they also called on all red-shirt groups to put aside their ideological and tactical differences to join together. They asserted that PM Abhisit could travel anywhere he wanted in Thailand except the eight upper northern provinces.

15. (C) A moderate red-shirt leader told us on November 24 that hardcore red-shirt protestors would be stationed at the airport and at the conference venue (Le Meridien hotel). He claimed they would be ready to set off fireworks and flares to prevent the PM's plane from landing, and to forestall any evacuation aircraft (helicopters) that may try to land or takeoff from the meeting venue. Some red-shirt supporters at the airport would

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also wear yellow shirts and provoke what would appear to be red-on-yellow clashes, he asserted. He opined that these actions are designed to provoke a violent reaction by local authorities and security forces. The same source told us a day later - after UDD's decision to cancel its November 28 Bangkok rally - that many northern red-shirt supporters who had been planning to travel to the Bangkok rally would now instead come to Chiang Mai to participate in the anti-Abhisit protest on the 29th. Separately, the Chiang Mai Vice Governor also told us that he expected participation in the Nov. 29 Chiang Mai rally to swell with northern red-shirt supporters who otherwise would have gone to the Bangkok demonstration.

16. (C) Separately, we note that while the Provincial Government (RTG-appointed) is in favor of the PM's visit going ahead as planned, the (elected) President of the Provincial Administrative Organization and former Chiang Mai Mayor Boonlert Buranupakorn - a known hardcore red-shirt supporter - has publicly recommended that the PM not come to Chiang Mai. According to the Vice Governor, Boonlert and pro-Thaksin Puea Thai MPs are bankrolling RCM51 and other militant red-shirt groups. (Note: Boonlert's nephew is the current Mayor, though he is facing legal challenges surrounding his election. Boonlert's brother is a former Thai Rak Thai MP and former Chiang Mai mayor, and is one of the 111 TRT politicians banned from holding political office.) The Vice Governor observed that this network of financial support from pro-Thaksin politicians provided RCM51 and other hardcore red-shirt groups in the north with resources that moderate red-shirt groups could not match.

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## The Government Responds

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17. (C) Armed with an audio tape of the November 19 broadcast, Chiang Mai's Provincial Government sought an arrest warrant for Phetcharawat, which the court has yet to issue, arguing it needs more evidence. Chiang Mai's Vice Governor blamed the provincial police for not securing additional evidence, such as witnesses who actually heard the broadcast. It remains unclear whether the police are actively seeking such evidence, or whether the pro-Thaksin bias of many rank and file police officers in Chiang Mai will stall this investigation, as the Vice Governor claims it has in other cases. (Note: Phetcharawat has complied with other arrest warrants issued for him, but publicly stated that he will not comply if one is issued in this case.)

18. (C) Beyond seeking the arrest warrant, the Vice Governor outlined for us other measures that will be in place to prevent protestors from interfering with the PM's program. On a regional level, governments in nearby northern provinces are collaborating on steps to slow down the flow of red-shirt supporters into Chiang Mai - with the aim of delaying their arrival until after Abhisit's departure (he is expected to be in Chiang Mai from about 9:00 to noon on the 29th). Neighboring provinces are also sending personnel and equipment to Chiang Mai to enable local authorities to screen all protestors in the vicinity of the meeting venue. The Vice Governor described these as "full scale" measures. Separately, two Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce (COC) executives scheduled to participate in the November 27-29 conference told us they are concerned for their personal safety, and are making arrangements to escape from the meeting venue on short notice if necessary.

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### Moderate Voices Speak Up, But Lack Influence

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19. (C) Fearful of the violence that could unfold, Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Thai Industries (COC and FTI) representatives belonging to the Coalition for a Peaceful and

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Livable Chiang Mai (Ref A) convened an urgent meeting of the group on November 24. The Provincial Government did not send representatives, but COC, FTI, yellow-shirt members and moderate red-shirt leaders attended. They were joined this time by three military intelligence officers, two religious leaders, and two representatives of a network of local government officials. All sides characterized the situation as worrisome, noting that up-country red-shirt supporters were actively being mobilized on instructions from Bangkok, and that there was no way to stop them. The military participants remarked that they expected at least 5,000 protestors to converge on Chiang Mai. (Comment: this figure is likely to be revised upward following the postponement of the November 28 red-shirt rally in Bangkok).

110. (C) The local government officials reportedly asked the COC and FTI participants why the national Chamber gathering had to take place now, and if they had given any thought to the costs of providing security for the PM. COC and FTI participants

replied that plans had been laid as far back as 2007 for this event, a venue had been set, and that it was very important for them to have a dialogue directly with the PM. A moderate red-shirt leader reportedly asked whether the two million plus residents of Chiang Mai province should let themselves be held hostage by a few hundred troublemakers, noting the importance of the silent majority speaking out forcefully and renouncing violence. Attendees agreed to hold a press conference on November 25, which was attended by COC, FTI, and both yellow and (moderate) red-shirt leaders. At that event, participants, including the Vice Governor, appealed for calm, and for the public not to disrupt the PM's visit.

11. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.  
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